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ABSTRACT

The focus of this paper is methods for training middle and lower managers, especially those in the field. It is helpful to regard those managers as change agents who must implement decisions coming from the top of the organization, usually in an authoritarian way. Periods of change in an organization can be the time for most effective development of managerial talents takes place. For such development, a well-designed training program is essential. A good program has these characteristics: 1) it provides for the learner's active participation; 2) it provides the trainee with knowledge of results of his attempts to improve; 3) it allows transfer of skills from training period to job; 4) it reinforces the trainee for appropriate behavior; 5) it provides for practice and repetition when needed; 6) it motivates the trainee, and 7) it assists the trainee in his willingness to change. The best training programs are those which regard the field manager as a change agent and shows him communication strategies appropriate to change agents. Training programs for Peace Corps volunteers and agricultural extension agents could be modified for management training. (JK)

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THE FIELD MANAGER AS CHANGE AGENT: A "NEW THINK" APPROACH TO AN OLD TRAINING PROBLEM

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> . . . A single success proves it can be done. Therefore, it is necessary to learn what made it work. R. K. Merton

The organizational function most apt to provide the learning to which Merton refers is training. An overt effort to train managers is probably the largest single step toward the guarantee of controlled managerial successes and the elimination of trial and error. The new thinking of top management seems to be to give more and more attention to training managers, particularly middle and lower range managers. Such new thinking is heartening because it represents a recognition of the importance of one of the primary aspects of good human relations in organizations. It offers definate promise that there is a trend toward regarding training as the essence of management. Further identification of this trend and the exploration of training methods appropriate to the needs of these middle and lower range managers is the focus of this paper.

However, it is, or should be, a first principle of training that the means fit the end, that the techniques be appropriate to the needs. We must, therefore, first examine the present demands upon management before we can identify its training needs.

Very basically, the business of managing in an organization is a business of human relations. In other words, management is a leadership-followership business. According to Katz and Kahn (1966, p. 309), instances of leadership involve the use of organizational structures to influence others. When people are influenced to engage in organizationally relevant behavior, leadership has occured. Management is a business of people communicating with other people and one in which machines are not likely to replace men.

It has been said that management and communication are so closely related that they are almost synonymous. Since it is an obvious fact that we really only manage with the consent of the managed, a manager must constantly be persuading the individual subordinates on the desirability of the organization's goals. Persuasion requires communication. Communication is, therefore, vitally necessary to an organization, not only to transmit authority, but to achieve cooperation. As such, the organizational communication system supplements the system of authority.

Katz and Kahn (1966, p. 302), state that they consider the essence of organizational leadership to be that influential increment over and above mechanical compliance with the routine directives of the organization. Perhaps this extra influential increment is the same "private commitment" notion referred to in the Kelman (1961) research. Such an influential increment derives from the fact that human beings rather than computers are in positions of authority and power. Management, then, is an organizational communication activity which is very human, vital, and is acknowledged by most to be the backbone of any organization.

If problems in organizational management do in fact present a challenging situation, the problems seem to be doubled and tripled in field management. Any description of a member of a management team, especially one operating in the field, sounds like he must be a one man conglomerate of Superman and Einstein with the hide of a rhinoceros and the endurance of an Olympic miler. Although this seems to be an exaggeration, Livingstone and Davis (1962), describe a field manager as a personal supervisor, the executor of headquarters' plans, a communication link between the market and the home office, and a super-salesman.

How does field management find itself in such a position? Today one

can easily observe the tendancy of general management to decentralize and free themselves from day-to-day business matters so as to better think about and organize for the future of their firms. There is a vigorous effort to force the responsibility for current problems downward. According to Revans, "it is clearly admitted that those in the field are nearer both the sources of information and the means of treatment" (1971, p. 170).

It is certainly legitimate to consider most of the field management force to be part of a hierarchical echelon often referred to as middle management. The interesting plight of the middle ranges of management is that they must face two ways in the organization. They must understand how those above them are likely to act because of their organizational position and how those below them are similarly motivated and limited by their placement in organizational space.

The critical task of field management is to piece out the organizational structure, or guide subordinates to do so, in ways which optimize organizational functioning. What is really involved here is the setting of appropriate management goals. Once the goals are determined and the principles are understood, the field manager must develop and decide upon a more specific set of communication strategies. That is, he must survey the means of communicating these goals to the particular receivers involved and select the best method, or combination of methods. The big concern, then, must be how to train management people to select the methods ~~goals~~ (?) which are potentially most effective in a given set of circumstances.

Of particular interest to us in this paper are those observations which point to the fact that the field manager is an executor of headquarters' plans and a communication link between the market and the home office. These observations lead us to a categorical label, or pair of labels, for

a field manager. He could normally be described in communication parlance as a gatekeeper or change agent. In this context the term gatekeeper refers to a person who filters messages as they come over the channel with control over which messages are passed along the channel and determines the most effective method of presenting them. The term change agent is defined as "a professional person who influences innovation-decisions in a direction deemed desirable by a change agency." (Rogers and Shoemaker, 1971, p. 227). The field manager is most particularly a change agent because his daily activities might be most accurately described by the foregoing change agent definition. This description fits because the field manager's main function is certainly to spread new ideas from the original source to the ultimate users and to influence them to adopt these new ideas. For instance, every waking, working hour a manager is attempting to gain maximum support, acceptance, and eventually commitment from his subordinates, whether he is introducing a new product or communicating a change in company policy. Introducing and implementing a change so that the desired innovation-decisions are achieved from the subordinates and the organizational benefits are fully realized is one of the most complicated and difficult aspects of the manager's job.

Rogers and Shoemaker (1971) delineate three basic types of innovation-decisions. The book describes one of these types, authority innovation-decisions, as being much more common in formal organizations than in any other type of social system. The book also states that the following characteristics distinguish authority innovation-decisions:

1. The individual is not free to exercise his choice in adopting or rejecting an innovation.
2. Decision-making and adopting are activities of two separate individuals or units.

3. The decision unit occupies a higher authority position in the social system than the adoption unit.

4. Because of this hierarchical relationship between the decision unit and the adoption unit, the decision unit can force the adoption unit to conform to its decision.

5. Authority innovation-decisions occur most frequently in formal organizations rather than informal social systems.

It should be clear by now that the manager operating in the field is a change agent and is normally engaged most often in the diffusion of authority innovations. Since this seems true, let us now take a closer look at how this system functions.

The following is a paradigm showing the normal steps in the authority innovation-decision process:

1. KNOWLEDGE about the need for change and the innovation.

2. PERSUASION concerning acceptance or rejection of the innovation by the decision unit.

3. DECISION concerning acceptance or rejection of the innovation by the decision unit.

4. COMMUNICATION of the decision to adoption units in the organization.

5. ACTION or implementation of the decision: adoption or rejection of the innovation by the adoption unit.

When the decision unit has chosen the innovation alternative it wishes to adopt, messages must be transmitted in a downward flow from superiors to subordinates, following the authority pattern of hierarchical positions, to the adoption unit. Key figures in such a vertical communication flow are the liaisons, in this case the field manager. The decision process may either authoritative, where the subordinates or potential adopters do not participate in the original decision, or participative, where they do.

Since the decision process in most formal organizations is authoritative rather than participative, many problems are posed for the field

manager. For instance, while the rate of adoption of authoritative decisions is usually faster than that of participative decisions, they are also more likely to be discontinued.

The effective realization of a change, then, is a stringent test of any manager's total abilities. And the success with which the anticipated benefits are achieved is dependent, in large measure, on the extent of that manager's abilities.

According to Judson (1966, p. 177), those periods when changes are being carried out in an organization can be the times when the most effective development of managerial talent and abilities is taking place. The process of introducing and implementing changes can be regarded as a crucible for management development and genuine development will occur only when managers are helped by their immediate superiors to learn the most fruitful lessons from both their successes and their failures. Without such guidance and coaching, the full benefit might not be realized from these experiences, and the antithesis of the Merton quote at the beginning of this paper would occur.

Judson (1966, p. VIII) further points out that how much any management achieves of the full benefits that could be derived from a change is determined by three independent variables:

1. Their skill in identifying and analysing the objectives of that change, and those problems requiring solutions.
2. Their skill in devising successful methods to accomplish these objectives and solve these problems.
3. Their skill in gaining acceptance and support for both the objectives and the methods for their achievement from the people affected by and involved in the change.

But can we expect managers to be skillful in all three of the above respects? Can managers improve their skills in introducing and

implementing changes? To do these things well, he would need a keen, logical and imaginative mind, together with sufficient reliable data obtained through an appropriate, well-designed training program.

There obviously must be some criteria developed to determine what training method is best in a given situation. According to Bass and Vaughan (1966), a technique will be judged adequate to the degree that it appears likely to:

1. Provide for the learner's active participation.
2. Provide the trainee with knowledge of results about his attempts to improve.
3. Promote by means of good organization, a meaningful integration of learning experiences that the trainee can transfer from training to the job.
4. Provide some means for the trainee to be reinforced for appropriate behavior.
5. Provide for practice and repetition when needed.
6. Motivate the trainee to improve his own performance.
7. Assist the trainee in his willingness to change.

Through the use of such criteria and through understanding both the information to be transferred and the individuals to whom it is being transferred, it is possible to select the proper training and methodology.

The need is obvious for training curriculum which will expose field managers to skills comensurate with their needs and the needs of the organization. Nearly as obvious, is the close fit between the real world duties of a field manager and the definition of a change agent. If much of the business of a field manager is in fact that of a change agent, then, the wisdom in training these managers to be change agents and to be facile with the correspondingly necessary communication strategies seems to be the most obvious of all.

At present, specialized training for change agents is pretty well developed in such fields as psychiatry, social work and etc. On the other hand, according to Lippitt, et al. (1958, p. 275), training for specialized work with groups and organizations is less developed, although there are a few centers where trainees may concentrate on these studies. Just what directions the further development of training for work with groups, and organizations should take is a question of real importance for curriculum development in our professional schools, in the behavioral science departments of our colleges and universities, and most important, in the management training programs of our organizations.

Since existing change agent training programs are geared more to the business of controlling the effectiveness of change than to any particular field, much of the curricula included in these programs could be used in management training with little or no revision. The training presently given to Peace Corps candidates or agricultural extension agents are examples of such programs. These training programs stress the application of communication research in the form of communication strategies, strategies which facilitate planned rather than haphazard, uncontrolled change in the system.

Viewing the field manager, then, as a change agent with all of the accompanying special problems and needs, we must apply "new think" training methods to these old training problems. Implementing the "new think" training methods by applying existing change agent training techniques to the present training needs of field management, is one way in which managers may learn to be repeatedly and pupposefully successful.

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